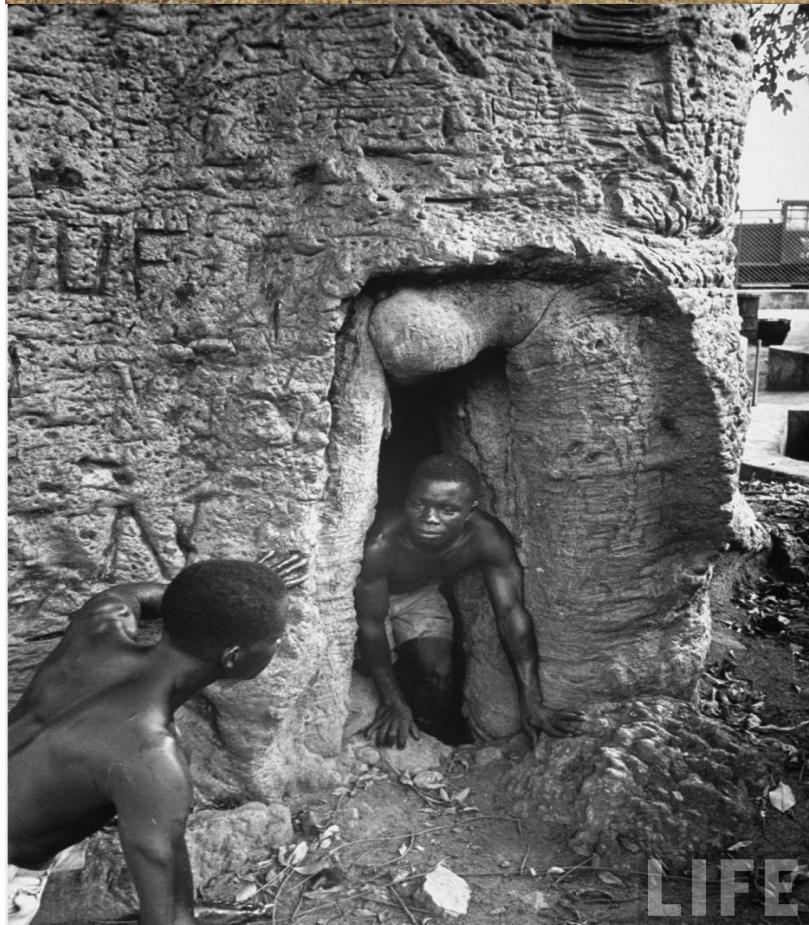


# The Secret Heart of the Tree

An African legion

Baobab tree



## The Secret Heart of the Tree

Told by Allan Davies

It was a hot, hot, hot day and Hare was really suffering. Sweat ran off the ends of his ears, and he was panting.

“I need some shade,” he said to himself. “If I don’t cool down, I’m going to melt.” So he hopped (slowly) over to the Baobab tree. It cast a big pool of lovely, cool shade all around its trunk. It looked really good to Hare, but he was a polite creature, so rather than just hopping into the shade, he said to the Baobab tree:

Baobab, can I rest in your shade, please? It’s very hot out here.” The Baobab rustled its leaves in surprise and said to Hare, “Of course you can. Stay as long as you like.”

Hare hopped into the shade beneath the tree and sat down. It was sooo lovely and cool. A little breeze sprang up from nowhere and ruffled his fur... He lay down, stretched out his legs, and felt much, much better.

“Thank you, Baobab. This is a beautiful cool patch of shade you have here. I feel much better already.”

The Baobab rustled its leaves, and a ripe, succulent fruit fell out of its branches and landed right next to Hare. Hare ate the fruit slowly, enjoying the juices and sweet taste.

“Thank you, Baobab. How did you know I was thirsty as well?” said Hare. He just lay there for a while, enjoying the peace and quiet, but then he started to itch. Right in the middle of his back, right in the part you just can’t reach yourself, no matter how hard you try... and you know what that’s like. It can easily drive you crazy.

“Baobab, I’ve got this dreadful itch,” he said. “Could I possibly scratch myself against your bark?”

The leaves rustled and the Baobab replied, “Scratch away, Friend.”

So Hare had a really good scratch, rubbing his back up and down the Baobab’s rough bark... It really hit the spot... ummmmm... good.

Leaves rustled and the Baobab said, “You’re the first person that’s had the courtesy to say please and thank you, so I’d like to show you something in return. I will open up, so you can come inside me, but you must promise not to take anything.”

“That would be wonderful,” said Hare. “I promise to be careful, and not to take anything.”

A small crack started in the top of the Baobab’s trunk, then grew wider as it ran down the trunk, all the way to the ground. Then the two halves of the trunk slowly creaked open like two giant doors.

Hare poked his nose inside... and then his jaw dropped so far that he nearly tripped over it... He hopped further in, over lush green grass. There was a little stream running through a meadow, and a soft, golden light that seemed to come from everywhere at once. He went further in and saw heaped piles of every kind of fruit, ripe and luscious... He was still hungry, and went towards them, but then he stopped, remembering his promise.

Then he saw something sparkling in the grass. A carpet of jewels, gold and silver, spread as far as he could see. He picked up a big ruby to look at it, then carefully put it back down, exactly where he had picked it up.

Shaking his head in amazement, Hare went on, deeper and deeper into the heart of the tree. Then he saw a pulsing green light. As he got

closer, he saw that the light was coming from an emerald as big as his head, sitting on top of a rock. It was the most beautiful thing that Hare had ever seen, and he reached out towards it longingly...then stopped.

"I can see you are someone that keeps your promises," said the Baobab. "Please choose something to take with you, as my gift."

What to take?

Hare thought about the fruit, and how he was still hungry. But if he took a fruit, he'd eat it, and then it would be gone. He went back to the jewels, and after a lot of searching, found a very plain gold ring. He held the ring up.

"Could I possibly take this?" he asked. "It would make a lovely present for my wife."

"Take it, and my blessings with it," replied the Baobab.

And so Hare hurried back out, and the trunk of the tree closed up again. Hare scurried home to his wife—who was absolutely delighted with her present. She put the ring round her tail, and sashayed about looking over her shoulder.

Hare made her promise not to tell anybody where she got the ring, and she agreed. Later on that day, she was hopping out, round and about, when she heard a snicker in her ear. It was Mrs. Hyena.

"Hee...hee...hee...nice ring there, nice ring...Where'd ya geddit?"

At first Mrs., Hare wouldn't tell, but Mrs. Hyena was big, and strong, and very mean, and she wouldn't let Mrs. Hare go until she'd got the truth out of her.

That night, when Hyena got home, his wife told him about Mrs. Hare's new jewelry.

"So? Whadd'ya saying here?" said Hyena.

"I'm saying if that stooped Hare can get a ring, you can get the whole shooting match for me. Hee-hee-hee-hee. So get up off your behind tomorrow and go on down to the Baobab tree, hee-hee-hee..."

So, the next morning, Hyena loped down to the Baobab tree.

"Hyah, bub, howya doin? Okay if I grab some shade, pal?"

The tree rustled its leaves and said, "Yes, o course, be my guest."

Hyena sat down and picked his nose for a while. Then he said, "Hey, I'm starving here! Where's the fruit?"

The tree rustled its leaves, said nothing, but dropped a fruit. Hyena scarfed it up in no time, belched, then said, "Got me an itch. Okay to scratch? I mean, I wouldn't want to offend anybody, or nothin'."

"Don't let me stop you," said the tree. So Hyena, who was always itching, had himself a good scratch on the tree's trunk. Then he lay about for a bit, giggling quietly to himself.

"Hey, I done the shade, I done the fruit, I done the scratch... When do I get to see inside, hey-ho-ho-ho-ho-ho?"

"Well," said the tree, "if you want, I suppose there's no harm. But you must..."

"Yeah, I know, keep the mitts off. I know the score," said Hyena.

The crack appeared in the top of the tree and spread to the ground, and once more the Baobab tree opened wide its secret heart. Hyena bounded inside, looking all over the place.

"Hey, coooooool...old Hare was right...well, I'll be..." He pulled some sacks out of his pocket, scooped up all the fruit, and put them in one sack. The jewels and gold went into another sack. Then Hyena saw the green glow and loped over.

“Cooooool.” He didn’t think twice, but grabbed the emerald and turned to leave.

But the light in the tree was dying, and the gap in the trunk closing. Hyena ran as fast as he could towards the narrowing strip of daylight.

But he wasn’t fast enough. With an almighty crash the trunk slammed shut.

And, as far as I know, he’s still in there.

Hyena was the last creature to see the secret heart of a tree. They won’t let us in anymore because they don’t trust anybody. And who can blame them?

Maybe, one day, we might be lucky enough to win back that trust and see the wonders in the heart of the tree.

If you model the behavior, you don’t have to post the rules.

--Payton Williams

Nowadays, people know the price of everything and the value of nothing

--Oscar Wilde (poet 1854-1900)

There is something fundamentally wrong with treating Earth as if it were a business liquidation

--Herman Daly (World Bank economist)

The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.

--Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882-1945)

Let Your Life Speak

--Quaker